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CLINTON
President of the
United States of America

EDUARDO FREI RUIZ-TAGLE
President of the
Republic of Chile

NOTE: This joint statement was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary, but it was not issued as a White House press release. An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Remarks in a Discussion on Microenterprise in Santiago, Chile April 16, 1998

Audience member. Mr. President, in your country, does microenterprise exist? Is there any special legislation for microenterprise? Do you have any support programs like we have here?

The President. First of all, yes, it exists. And in the more prosperous areas of America, people can simply go to established training programs, as you have described, and then they typically will go to work for someone else, or if there is a demand there, they can often—can get credit from a bank and borrow money.

But in the poorer areas of America—because, keep in mind, there are still some parts of our country which are much poorer than others, mostly in the inner cities of our large cities, in some neighborhoods, or in some of our rural areas, or with some of our native Indian populations, where people are living a long way from the center of economic activity. And the truth is that in some places there are special programs to give credits, but in most places there aren't.

Now, when Hillary and I were living at home in Arkansas, we helped to start a bank to lend to small-business people with a special program for microentrepreneurs, for very small loans to people who were poor but who had good skills, good reputation, clearly would pay the money back. And then when I became President, we worked to pass through the Congress a modest program—as Mrs. Frei said, within the budget—but a modest program to set up institutions like this all across America.

In addition to that, we have, through our foreign aid programs—we are trying to support people like you all over the world. I just—we visited in Africa with some microentrepreneurs just recently. And every year, through our programs, we make about 2 million small loans across the world to people like you, because you really are the future of all these countries. I mean, if people like you—the stories you've told, that is the future. And as far as I know, the worst repayment rate anywhere in the world for microenterprise loans—the worst—is 97 percent. Some countries that have terrible weather problems, poor people go broke if they have a bad storm and they can't pay it back, and it drops all the way to 97 percent. Otherwise, it's always 99, 100 percent; you know, the people pay it back. So that's why I wanted to hear your stories.

But on the other hand, I agree with Mrs. Frei that the most important thing is to first have the training, because if you have it in your head—still many people find a way to get into business, to save or to borrow or to whatever.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 1:20 p.m. in the San Miguel neighborhood. In his remarks, he referred to Marta Frei, wife of President Eduardo Frei of Chile. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to Business and Community Leaders in Santiago April 16, 1998

Thank you very much, Mr. President, Mr. Fernandez, Mr. Riesco, Mr. Mayor, ladies and

gentlemen. First, let me thank President Frei for the warm welcome that Hillary and I and